

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4537

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

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AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PDEV, UK

SUBJECT: DEVOLUTION: PREVIEW OF COMING ATTRACTIONS

1. AS PARLIAMENT LAST WEEK FINALLY ROSE EXHAUSTED FROM ITS GRUELING SESSION, THE EXPECTATION GREW THAT THE NEXT SESSION MIGHT PROVE EVEN MORE BRUTAL. WHEN LEGISLATORS RETURN TO THE CHAMBER IN THE AUTUMN, THEY WILL FACE AN ISSUE OF DEEP CONSEQUENCE FOR THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT AND POSSIBLY FOR THE KINGDOM. THE SIGNS OVER THE LAST TWO WEEKS ARE THAT THE DEVOLUTION BILL, WITH ALL IT PERTAINS FOR THE FUTURE OF GREAT BRITAIN, WILL BE THE SUBJECT

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OF INTENSE DEBATE, A STRAIN ON PARTY UNITY ON BOTH SIDES

OF THE AISLE, AND THE MOST DIFFICULT CHALLENGE JAMES CALLAGHAN HAS FACED SINCE BECOMING PRIME MINISTER.

2. A SUPPLEMENTARY WHITE PAPER INTRODUCED BY THE GOVERNMENT LAST WEEK MODIFIED SOME ASPECTS OF THE NOVEMBER 1975 WHITE PAPER ON DEVOLUTION AND TIDIED UP CORNERS OF GOVERNMENT THOUGHT. MOST ATTENTION REMAINS FOCUSED ON SCOTLAND AND THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE ASSEMBLY, EXECUTIVE, AND JUDICIARY. IN THE NEW PLAN, THE POWERS OF THE SCOTTISH SECRETARY OF STATE HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY PARED. HIS VETO AUTHORITY--PERHAPS TOO REMINISCENT OF A COLONIAL GOVERNOR GENERAL--IS DROPPED AND THE POWER TO APPOINT THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF SCOTLAND IS TRANSFERRED FROM THE SECRETARY'S OFFICE TO THE ASSEMBLY. THE ROLE OF THE JUDICIARY IS ENHANCED WITH A PROVISION FOR JUDICIAL REVIEW OF ACTS BY THE ASSEMBLY IN A COMMITTEE OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL OUTSIDE THE CONTROL OF THE ASSEMBLY AND BEYOND THE INFLUENCE OF THE SECRETARY. THE NEW WHITE PAPER, HOWEVER, DOES NOT RESOLVE THE SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY'S REVENUE-RAISING POWERS. THE NOVEMBER PROPOSAL, WHICH ALLOWED THE ASSEMBLY TO LEVY AN INCOME OR PURCHASE TAX, HAS BEEN DROPPED AND REPLACED WITH NOTHING. THE NEW ASSEMBLY MIGHT THUS BE WHOLLY DEPENDENT ON AN ANNUALLY NEGOTIATED BLOC GRANT FROM WESTMINSTER, AND MANY OBSERVERS CLAIM THAT SUCH A FORMULA INVITES IRRESPONSIBILITY IN EDINBURGH AND ASSURES WESTMINSTER OF THE EASILY ASSAILABLE ROLE OF MISERLY WHIPPING BOY.

3. THE SUPPLEMENTARY WHITE PAPER DREW ADDITIONAL CRITICISM FOR WHAT IT FAILED TO SAY. THE DOCUMENT DID NOT ADDRESS THE QUESTION OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION NOR THE INCONSISTENCY OF DEVOLVED POWERS IN SCOTLAND ALONG SIDE SCOTTISH OVER-REPRESENTATION IN WESTMINSTER. THE BROADER CONSTITUTIONAL PROBLEMS OF DEVOLVING REGIONAL POWERS WHILE PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF THE KINGDOM WERE NOT RECOGNIZED. GENERALLY, THE WHITE PAPER SEEMED TO DANGLE TOOMANY LOOSE ENDS FOR AN ISSUE OF SUCH LASTING SIGNIFICANCE.
WITH THIS LESS THAN GLEEFUL RECEPTION FOR THE LATEST DOCUMENT ON DEVOLUTION, THE GOVERNMENT IS CONTINUING ITS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONSIDERATION OF THE PROBLEM AND MAY ANSWER SOME OF THE CURRENT OBJECTIONS WHEN THE BILL IS FINALLY DRAFTED AND PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT.

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FILE; TELEGRAM TEXT FOR THIS SEGMENT IS UNAVAILABLE

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